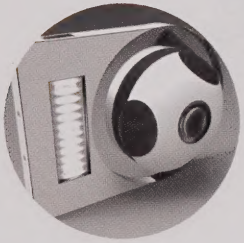
why i write
why i create



Not one voice but many

5th Year Retrospective: 2015–2019

Massachusetts College of Art and Design

why i write why i create

Not one voice but many

5th Year Retrospective: 2015–2019

Jeanette Luise Eberhardy, *Curator*

Massachusetts College of Art and Design

FOREWORD

Mary Grant, *President*
Massachusetts College of Art and Design

ESSAYS

Debbie Hagan

Lyssa Palu-ay

Sondra Grace

Lin Haire-Sargeant

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President's Foreword

I am delighted MassArt is able to share this 5th Year Retrospective for *why I write. why I create* (2015–2019) with the world. Over the years, this exhibit has sought to expand our ability to reclaim and reimagine stories for today's audiences. It has been a vehicle for students to explore the blossoming of integral relationships with themselves, their cultures, and the universe. Each year, participants have found magical connections among creative journeys with origins in Angola, Brazil, China, Colombia, Haiti, India, Iran, Japan, Mexico, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, South Korea, Taiwan, Turkey, Vietnam, and the U.S. Their stories have invited the reader to respond with empathy to a wide range of experiences that began in working and middle class families, in rural and urban settings, as well as with first generation college students.

For this 5th Year Retrospective, in our 150th Anniversary year, we celebrate the exhibit's theme: *not one voice but many*. By learning from many voices, we can see new possibilities in our own lives and our communities. The MassArt faculty are a constant source of inspiration and knowledge for the participants. Today these mentors continue to guide the next generation of artists, designers, makers, and educators to "listen with their imagination," because empathy requires imagination. This practice with empathy encourages us to honor the human dignity in everyone.

On behalf of all of the participants and their mentors, we thank you. We also offer our deep appreciation to Mayor Michelle Wu and her leadership at Boston City Hall for including this retrospective in the Mayor's Neighborhood Gallery (March 1–April 14, 2023).

Thank you for lifting up our students' voices and listening to their stories.

Mary

— Mary Grant, PhD
President, Massachusetts College of Art and Design

Introduction

In 2015, we invited students at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design to answer the prompt *why I write. why I create*. Their responses revealed the unfolding of individual integrity, that is, exploring an openness with themselves sustained by their dedication to honest storytelling. Their responses also showed a desire to learn how to live and work during a time when important conversations on *justice for all* surfaced in their communities and around the world.

For the first exhibit, twenty-two writers shaped their responses into 300–word flash nonfiction stories. They also contributed one image of their art. Their work was displayed on 30"×40" posters in one of the main hallways of the college. Placed side-by-side, these stories expressed the plurality of the human experience with origins from more than 15 countries. This collection of stories formed a kind of sanctuary that invited the reader into an intimate dialogue on precious moments of growth often overlooked in daily routines. The stories showed the evolution of self on the edge of being and becoming.

In the second year of the exhibition, the feeling of a collective dialogue began to grow. Students continued to practice the courage needed to join conversations that were not always comfortable, but they found strength in acknowledging the truth in their lived experiences. They declared *life is so much more*!

For many of the participants in this exhibition, reflecting on their relationship with creative work was uncharted territory. All their lives they worked to support their families and themselves without necessarily thinking about the connection to their work. Writing a story for the exhibit helped them to forge a newfound awareness on how the meaning of any work—even artistic/creative work—is deepened with an appreciation for the effort. Each reflection offers a new insight.

why I write. why I create presents unique expressions from the next generation of artists and designers who are searching for the untold stories that we need to live our lives today.

— Jeanette Luise Eberhardy, PhD, MFA
Curator

Mentors foster creative growth

Power of I Am

DEBBIE HAGAN, MFA

I am. These two slim words declare, *I'm here...I matter... please listen.*

In Thinking, Making, Writing, a first-year course at MassArt, I introduce students to the "I am" poems of Walt Whitman, John Clare, and M.S. Merwin. Each begs readers to: Listen. Hear what I have to say.

Yet, it's George Ella Lyons' poem, "Where I'm From," embedded with rich, sensory language that becomes a touchstone for most students. Lyons whisks readers off to Kentucky, to the farm of her youth, where laundry smelled of Clorox and hung on the line to dry. There's fried corn, strong coffee, Sunday School projects, and the pleas of elders: *perk up* and *pipe down*. Each of these memories, Lyons shows us, has shaped her into the writer, educator, and poet she has become.

Where does your art come from? What brought you to MassArt? Show me in snippets. Use all the senses.

As I give this prompt, students dig through their memories. They recall the tangible: scribbles, art lessons, museum trips, school murals, and gifts of paint, brushes, canvases, and easels. However, it's the intangibles, the anger, sadness, fear, divorce, poverty, and death, that's harder to pin down and define, yet it's real fodder for the muse.

Four years ago, my student, Indë Francis, read their "Where the Art Is From" poem in class. Their hands shook. They looked down, but I heard the most beautiful response ever to this prompt.

I am from many stories read and abandoned, or transformed and adapted. I am from skate parks and scraped knees, bent down to observe the lives of bees.

Indë connected with Lyons' rich sensory language. They drew power from the understated, adding their own rhythms and internal rhymes. I shared Indë's poem with the curator of the *why I write, why I create* exhibition, which showcases some of the best writing at MassArt. I hoped that maybe Indë's poem might fit this exhibit...and the curator told me it did.

When I shared the news with Indë, I explained that the poem would be printed on large poster board, displayed in the hallway leading to the Design and Media Center. Everyone at school would see it. At the closing reception, Indë would read the poem to the crowd, while a live jazz band played.

Indë loved the idea, especially the jazz accompaniment. However, they did not want to read in front of such a large crowd.

Thus, I offered to read without thinking how self-conscious I often feel standing in front of a big group like this, and, in this case, many would be my colleagues. I practiced Indë's poem over and over. Then, the night of the readings, as I approached the microphone, my knees felt weak. My heart raced, and I worried that maybe this poem was not for me to read. Yet, it was too late. I had to go through this...and do it for Indë.

I am from warm words and cold implications...from a brotherhood "broken or fixed?"...from a family I now know to call mixed.

On the word "implications," I bobbled, then quickly righted myself. Before I had a chance to stumble again, the jazz band cut in.

Now, as the Fifth Year Retrospective of *why I write, why I create* approaches, I can't help but think of Indë...my shy student with their lovely lyric poem. Where are they now?

A Google search leads me to Indë's smiling face. As I dig deeper into the website, I'm shocked to see them as the lead singer in a soulful funk band. They have produced two albums and at work on a third.

Indë's big, confidant smile and gentle voice fills me with warmth. I watch as they dance and sing. And in the lyrics somewhere I think I hear, *I am here...I matter...please listen.*

The Unexpected Gift of Vulnerability

LYSSA PALU-AY, PhD, MFA

The last five years of *why I write. why I create* has given us deep insight into the minds and hearts of emerging artists and designers. I have had the honor to know some of the writers through the Academic Compass program that supports first-generation college students at MassArt. In their work, I hear questions of identity that I have often asked myself as a first-generation born Filipina American. I, too, like Wandy Pascoal feel: "There is not one life lesson I have not had to learn from scratch." These lessons are where Wandy has learned to stand her ground as an immigrant from Angola. Through her written and visual language she has found validation. These experiences have been echoed before by those of us navigating a country and systems that were not intended for us. Yet, the intuitions reflected in these writings offer astonishment and hope.

Mariana Yanes Cabral brings this perspective to life sharing that her role as a translator for her family is a powerful position. But unlike other battlefields, she is simultaneously a general and messenger. I would add she is also like a scout with a heightened sense of awareness tuned to gathering nuanced information only possible through the eyes of an artist. Her perceptions are generous, clear eyed, and sometimes devastating. My heart feels like it is breaking open when I read her words, and I am reminded of the Sufi teacher Hazrat Inayat Kahn who says, "Maybe our hearts break over and over again so they remain open." Mariana's work is dedicated to making this true.

The writings in this collection also relay encounters of being misunderstood. Darrell Hunt confronts this head

on with his reflection on the color Black. He opposes the certainty of the dictionary by scratching out negative connotations of this color in a liberatory gesture. In this action, he asks us to reconsider the definition. He challenges me to wonder about other areas where we need to scratch out our assumptions. As a counterpoint, he tells us the potential and possibility of Black as an accurate role model taking the pain of indifference to make something beautiful.

There is also a common thread of realization about how a space to write offers sustenance and support. Writing provides a visual companion giving feelings and ideas another container. Mattaya Fitts describes it in this way: "Blank white pages cushion my fall against an onslaught of thoughts." In her description rather than fear that is often described with a blank page, she sees comfort in attending to the flood of thoughts that could overwhelm her. Her words confirm her truth of what it is to feel and offer a steady confidence through adversity.

Rico St. Paul similarly finds encouragement in connection to the writing process. His relationship with words can be described like a choreographed dance where each gesture of movement may explain feelings, space, and time. He moves to stretch and expand himself to be in a place of possibility and greater understanding. The process for him is just as satisfying as the final movement. He writes "to organize beauty from fact... to see what is true." In his writings, he overcomes fear but uses it as a prompt to germinate new seeds of inspiration.

why I write. why I create is a space of recalibration. In this space, expressions are unfiltered and authentic. The burden of expectation for the participants has been lifted, and we revel in the transformation of their voices. *why I write. why I create* is also a catalyst for cultural change. But what rises to the surface is not something new but rather a recognition of something that has been there all along. *why I write. why I create* is also a shelter where one can rest without shame, take a breath and appreciate the unexpected gifts of vulnerability.

Connections: Art, Design and Words

SONDRA GRACE, MS

Fashion Design students are trained to look for artistic inspiration and industry references to create apparel designs and to build collections. This design process includes gathering research, trend forecasts, fabric stories and innovative details – all packaged in storyboard and garment presentations. The abundance of online images and influencers makes it hard to select and assemble the visuals that best represent a student's instinctive and unique design story. Words, along with the visuals, help to complete the design package – yet fashion students find it challenging to create a design narrative.

Starting in 2015, a selected group of fashion students participated in the first *why I write. why I create* workshop which covered building personal art vocabularies and mind mapping exercises to advance their storytelling skills. The results were extraordinary. Students would link writing assignments with their fashion design process and what they wanted to address about their studio work.

In 2015 the *why I write. why I create* stories included fashion design students Andrea-Lijoy Shields and Roshan Akbari Khayrkhah. Andrea's essay evoked a keen sense of self-realization and growth that was also indicated in her designs. Roshan found an inner voice; her essay connected to achievements and being true to self. Both Andrea and Roshan conjured the sense of sound – "I create my own sound" and "The background noise of my crazy life."

JC Hang in 2017 was most comfortable delivering sketches and fabric-manipulated samples

without speaking. His richly embellished designs in vibrant colors were loud, yet JC spoke in a modest voice. When JC completed his essay, all things came together. His words revealed a deep, poignant thought process and his absolute love of fashion. He stated a "belief in the beauty of fashion" and offered ways to view his designs as "light reflecting on rough edges."

The *why I write. why I create* exhibition in the Tower Lobby at MassArt influenced students in the fashion design department to use their voices when presenting their theme-driven collections. By 2018 the essays created by Marianicy Cruz and Sheri Klak showed how students benefitted from seeing the exhibit. Developing illustrative descriptions within a central theme for essays and studio work became a tandem practice.

Marianicy's essay declaration: "This is my third attempt – this is my fourth attempt – I have more than one story" directly connected to her designs. Her special creative process included hand-painting motifs and layering colors to change fabric surfaces – sometimes done after the garment was completely constructed. Sheri Klak embraced traditional craftsmanship. Her designs communicated advanced drafting and draping skills coupled with the haute couture techniques used by atelier stitchers. In *why I write. why I create* Sheri declared "I didn't leave home with much I brought my mother's Bernina – a solid workhorse sewing machine. Not taking it was never an option."

During her senior year Ariana Chariton created apparel for a purpose. Her project featured designs to replace the basic gowns that children wore when in the hospital for a procedure. Ariana's gowns were made with soft organic fibers, natural tie-dyed fun colors and fasteners that didn't interfere with any lab tests. She tenaciously worked to perfect her collection, to garner industry interest and gain financial support so that she could provide the gowns for free to children – and she did.

In Spring 2019 Ariana lead a group performance of *why I write. why I create* with her essay "Dear Universality, Is it true that vulnerability is your older brother and empathy your younger sister...?"

The entire program was a magical happening filled with essays delivered by students from different departments. The audience enthusiastically enjoyed each reading and the accompanying music. From Ariana's essay "... to show my deepest thoughts and feelings" that resonated throughout – MassArt students delivered an outstanding showcase of their reality, lived experiences, and personal voices.

Making a Mark of Meaning

LIN HAIRE-SARGEANT, PhD

"Without stories, we're empty." That's the line I see written in the open guestbook before I enter a collaborative student art-and-essay show titled *why I write. why I create*. The students' stories inscribed on large banners and mounted on the walls filled my mind and expanded my spirit as I walked the corridor reading, observing.

At first encounter, I see a queue of large, uniformly sized rectangular posters regimented in rows down the walls of a long hall, as though they are identical doors to as many identical rooms. But when I reach the first door-shaped banner and pause to take it in, I gradually understand its individuality: backgrounds muted; student essays' words in white. Every banner emblazons a unique full-color visual art piece by its writer, and every essay pops one vivid key phrase in mega-sized font. Each student was invited to go behind the personal door of their psyche to write their story.

The banners in this exhibition come from MassArt writing courses taught since 2015. At the end of each year, the curator prepared a banner exhibition, and now, after five years, this Retrospective.

What I deeply appreciate is that each writer struggled, using a medium made of words, to fight their difficult way into a deeper understanding of their art creation, as each answers the questions the exhibition title poses, *why I write, why I create*.

Part of my pleasure is in observing the uncovering of unexpected parallels between created worlds. Two writers record epiphanies opened by extraordinary

places: Tomomi Yoshida found in a childhood visit to a house under construction a room that "glowed with the warm color of the plywood and all the loose dust danced around in the negative space." In her essay, she vividly reconstructs that quiet moment, and comes to the realization it was this vision's power that led her to study architecture. For Camden O'Neil, it's a solitary night in a deep forest that inspires. He tells us "the dark forest made anything seem possible." Then he heard the "lumbering breath" of something improbably large just outside his tent. "I held my breath, closed my eyes, and waited to hear if I would die. . . . When I sat down at my desk and thought about why I write, the night in the forest came alive again." For Camden and Tomomi, recreating places of power in words captured magic.

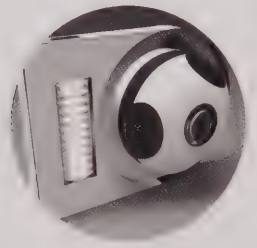
Two more writers start with apparent misfortunes but break through to unexpected grace. Nicholas Collazo's nose made him dread other people's reactions to the "obtrusion" on his face, but eventually he came to a new appreciation: "From this constant pressure about what I should look like, came my love for fantasy, fairytales, and stories. I guess that's probably the reason why I love my nose more and more. It tells a story, my story. " Leah Gilbode begins with a more comprehensive negative: "Where I come from, people don't go to college." Working class families like hers are often "mocked for their ways of being" by the media. But Gilbode concludes, "I write and create to show another view. . .With my art, the materials, objects, techniques all come from my social strata, and they are used to create a full truth."

Breaking through to the full truth is difficult. I see this demonstrated when I read Veronica Pedrosa's essay. She repeats "I'm trying to say" like a mantra. After she expresses one thing to her satisfaction ("I'm trying to say society has taught us to be superficial") she repeats the starting phrase and gets closer to her mark, ("I'm trying to say that the color of my skin should not dictate how I act"). The next thing is closer still ("I'm trying to say that we should not run from our characteristics"). With each repetition, she carves out her whole truth and leads herself and the reader to understand the close connection between saying and knowing. Each writer's words make a mark of meaning, just as does each brush stroke of an artist.

why I write, why I create: The Retrospective is a tribute both to the power extraordinary teaching can wield and to the tremendous potential of word art. MassArt faculty and their students have beautifully demonstrated that writing and art together can be greater than the sum of their parts.

Participants reveal moments of growth

I will write my head inside out.

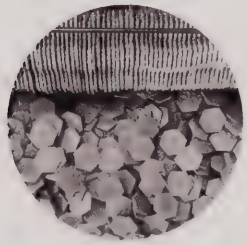


I write almost for the same reason that I read. Like two sides of the same coin, there isn't one without the other. So if you question why I write, it's because I want you to be a part of it. Everyday I have new reasons, but on a day like today, I write because you occupy my mind. If it will bring me one inch closer to you, I will write my head inside out.

I want to promote hope in my writings, sparking interest for the heart to persist in faith. In doing so I get carried over to deeper thinking, as it intrigues me to expose the simplicity of things that seem complex. It is also my agenda to reveal how complicated the simple things really are. I will present you the unexpected view, and it will be something we both navigate. So if you pay me any mind, keep in yours that you are in mine. And so I write.

Paul Simpson, *Industrial Designer*

I write to **remain insane**, for sanity doesn't suit me well.



I write to keep insane, for sanity doesn't suit me well.

A waterfall of ideas pours out of my mind, cascading into the river of my skull. Ideas bleed out of the crevice of a pen, seeping into the fibers of the sheets of thin paper hanging on to the torn moleskin I keep in the back pocket of my jeans. I write small phrases, code words, and summaries of theories I develop at night. I write out of doubt, and I write out of knowledge. I write to solve problems, of the problems I create myself to solve. I write to then realize that problems are also creations of our minds, for we humans have no reason to exist if we have nothing to solve. I write to see my face in the absence of a mirror, to remind myself that we are more thought than pure matter.

I
write
out
of
order,
because I can't find where
the beginning is.

I write out of confusion. Because each time I close my eyes, I see nothing but myself floating in the abyss, with fleeting sheets of paper hovering out of my reach. What message am I missing? I will never know.

So I create a problem to solve, to squander my sanity, and I write it down on paper.

David H. Troice, *Designer and Sculptor*

Art and writing were my life before I came to the U.S.

Art, reading and writing were my life before I came to the U.S. I stopped writing and reading when no one wanted to talk to me or admire my existence! After a life being involved in everything, I became invisible. Then you came to my life and made me write again. Now I am writing to you.

Your innocent face with dark brown eyes and your cute cheeks made me grab my pen and tell about the moment you were born, the first moment you smiled at us, the first moment you stood up by yourself. How proud you were!

When I write to you, everything feels connected the same way it does when I walk in nature and hear the music in everything. You became the melody that plays over the background noise of my crazy life. Your melody makes me calm.

I can see you as a young man reading my notes. I can see you holding your baby in your hands and reading it to him/her.

I wished designing and making a dress was as easy as writing to you.

Roshan Akbari, *Fashion Designer*

Italics are the voice of the other.

Italics are the voice of the other.

Italics instill every word with a vibrating urgency. The impact is trance-like, undeniable. It's the encrypted program running in the background on the page and on the screen. Italics thrum to the undercurrent of its echo. Is this the voice of the monster?

Italics lend themselves to art by placing a dissociative distance between me and the page—yet they beckon to be read. Italics hum even when no one is reading. Bold is not enough, capitalization is not enough. Italics other themselves. You could call it sinister. Are italics my voice against the monster?

If your eyes must be dragged across the page, if type is screaming at you from every surface, if you must read, let it be in italics. Let them be heard as an animal voice—an otherworldly voice. In this creature's freedom, I find joy.

I luxuriate in italics.

Nicole Barr, *Illustrator and Animator*

I mean the soft–spoken, insecure people who inhabit every workplace...

It is important to someone like me to transfer my thoughts to paper. By "someone like me," I mean the soft-spoken, insecure people that inhabit every workplace and institution in the world. We are everywhere. But you probably haven't noticed because you haven't heard our voices. When you do, they're muffled and ineloquent. And while you listen to stumbled-over words and shaky voices, the thoughts and ideas sometimes come across as malformed, seemingly undeveloped. Just like our voices.

I've been asked, "Why do you keep a journal?" I offer no reply. Instead, I shrug my shoulders. But I know the reason. In the journal, I say what I actually intend to say. No quivering voice. No jittery nerves. No judgment. Just meaning.

I proofread my thoughts, and decide what to tell, if anything at all. In the end, it doesn't matter if they listen. It doesn't matter if I speak. I can always keep my thoughts to myself, scrawled in a notebook. No quivering voice. No jittery nerves. No judgment. Just meaning.

My meaning. This is why I write.

John Brady, *Graphic Designer*

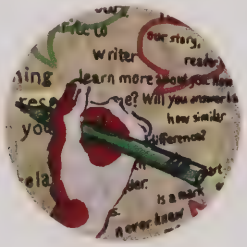
Oh, now the feelings are starting to kick in.

I feel lonely at this very moment in a city where people crowd every corner. I am homesick, yet I live forty minutes away. I miss recognizing faces. Anxiety has my fingers typing the thoughts that speed through my head. Hemingway once said that in order to be a good writer, you have to bleed. I understand that you have to write with feeling, but what if you have none? I am numb and cold. I tend to over-think things so much so that I start to panic. My palms begin to sweat.

Oh, now the feelings are starting to kick in, after warming up. I write because I am often confused. I write when I am sad. I write because there was a time in my life when I felt so alienated that writing was the only thing I could do to record a conversation for myself. I write because I will never see the world through another person's eyes. I write to understand why I judge myself by my intentions and others by their actions. I write because I can read and write, go to college, and live comfortably, while others face a life of poverty and illiteracy. I write because when you're young there is a sense of innocence, which we miss as we grow old. I write so I will never be alone.

Eddie Callie, *Painter*

I write to start our story, the story between the writer and the reader.



I'm sorry that I can't become you. I may not be someone you expect me to be. I am afraid that I won't suit you. I fear the start, which will eventually lead to an end. Will our story be a happy ending, or a tragedy? Maybe you won't understand who I am until the very end. Maybe you will understand me, but won't accept who I am. I have control of my story, but no one had control over ours. Still, I write to trigger a start. I write to start our story, the story between the writer and the reader.

I write wishing to learn more about you. How will you respond to me? Will you answer back? Will you be glad to learn how similar we are, or be shocked by our differences? You are now in a relationship with me, a relationship of the writer and the reader. Here is a start of a story between us. Here is a mark of our distance that we never knew until now. Will you come closer, or run off far, far away? Through our relationship you will become who you are, and I will become who I am.

Here is our start. Shall we continue on?

Peter Chen, *Illustrator*

When I write, I find shelter.

When I write, I find shelter. I make a place to hide when I feel like the world wants to devour my bones, cripple my spirit. I can count on the blank page to cushion my fall. When the feeling strikes, I write in deep fervor with a creased brow, my pen digging furiously into paper. Here, in my journal, I can experience the past as it happened and decide what it was. This is the only way I can hold onto the truth, a truth that only I know.

When I write, I carry my words on my back, along with other necessities, so that I may never lose them. My words live in a black, Moleskine book where I can remember the good, the bad, the tragic, and the magnificent. My words give me the space I need to realize my mistakes and to forge a path to forgiveness. They hold a truth that helps me remember to feel.

Mattaya Fitts, *Painter and Photographer*

My soul has been changed by these experiences.

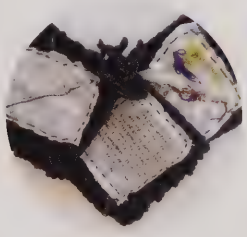
My soul has been changed by these experiences. Twenty–two years I have walked the earth, and I have been writing for about 17 of them. I always struggled with writing, and it cost me summers spent inside classrooms in the miserable heat. While inside perfecting my English skills, I looked out the window and dreamed about what my friends were doing—probably long boarding at the swimming hole or racing dirt bikes. My poor writing skills allowed me to meet new friends because I was held back in school. I might not be here writing this if it weren't for that.

I like to write about experiences that I enjoy such as feeling the wave under my board or the twigs that snap under the front wheel of my motorcycle as I flow through the woods. I write to inspire, to embrace fear and flight. I ask myself, what next? What do you want to do for the rest of your life? Should I explore jungle rats in Croom, Florida, by two wheels or surf 25 foot waves in Teahupoo?

If I have a magical thought or idea, I write it down in short, sporadic notes: don't forget, your observations are useful, show you care, images are your words. I write because at a very young age I knew I saw things differently. I learned to push myself and to accept failure in order to grow. Now I live and my words seem to follow close behind.

Ben Gustavson, *Filmmaker*

Back and forth my hands move, crisscrossing between syllables and sentences.



I've thought about how, and I've thought about when, but I have never thought about why I write. Why do I write? Why do I create? It wasn't until I asked myself these questions that I realized how easy the brain-to-hand connection is for me compared to my brain-to-mouth connection. In the middle of my speech, I lose my underdeveloped thought and the word "like" begins to show up like a hiccup that I wish would go away.

Long pauses follow.

I wait to collect the thoughts that have escaped. I find some lingering thread of an idea, but my listeners are gone. The pressure of time doesn't exist in my writing. I have all the space I need to sort through my thoughts. Writing helps me stitch my ideas together. Back and forth my hands move, crisscrossing between syllables and sentences without a falter in speech. I pick up letters, I work in syllables, I tie words to connect us. I read my writing aloud, and I hear what I could sound like.

This is why I write.

Erin MacEachern, *Painter*

Ican writ einc odes...

I'm in a stumpy frumpy clumpy dumpy lumpy grumpy funk. Is there a single nice word ending in umpy? Eyesight is blurred, mind is foggy, hands are cramped. The lethargy is pervasive. Questions float to the surface. "Why draw?" Everything feels hopeless because it's February. Making a picture feels bad right now. I'm forced to look at every mistake because it's right there on the paper. All those shapes on the page are trying so hard to be something.

I write when I'm not brave enough to draw, when I want to create something without feeling success or failure. Those inky little marks hardly offend my eyes. I can write and write and never have to read what was written. I can write so scribbly that words are illegible. Ican writ einc odes otha tmywords ared iffi cult tode ciph eryz. I can write ideas until I'm brave enough to draw them.

I'm only an artist if I am creating something right now. I can't take responsibility for completed works. When I feel stumped, I become fearful. What if I never experience enthusiasm again? Writing alleviates that fear for a bit and if I'm lucky it might even open a door to inspiration.

Victoria Maxfield, *Illustrator*

Thump thump thump, my heart beats to the drum of time.

Thump thump thump, my heart beats to the drum of time, the constant ticking of the clock. As days disintegrate into overlooked moments, I am constantly aware of the one thing we are always trying to save.

This background drum interrupts...interrupts... interrupts my thoughts. I breathe in and then out to remind myself that I'm living and not just existing. I breathe in and then out to remind myself that the drumming in my thoughts is just background noise; I must not allow it to consume me.

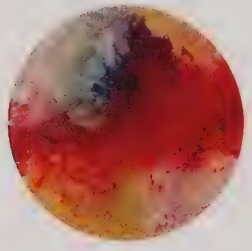
Live.

In a rain cloud of pouring emotions, I put my pen to paper and write. The storm begins to pass. The sirens, the bustle of the city and all the sounds in between, crumble into a peaceful calm. The unfathomable power of words reminds me to stay true to myself.

I write because I sometimes forget, as we all do, that moments grow into a lifetime. By writing, time is no longer the enemy. The ink soaks into my veins, disperses through my body, and becomes the antidote. I refuse to get lost in the noise. Instead, with my words I create my own sound, waiting to be heard.

Andrea-Lijoy Shields, *Fashion Designer*

I'm trying to say that society has taught us to be superficial, to overlook uniqueness.



We all see the same moon, and it is always the size of a thumb. The sky looks the same everywhere, but the colors of magical sunsets blend together perfectly to create beauty. Why can't life be as simple as that? Why are our lives directed by capitalism instead of true human values like modesty and humbleness?

I'm trying to say society has taught us to be superficial, to overlook uniqueness, and to dismiss the extraordinary in our day-to-day ordinary lives. But I'm also trying to say that society has told us to look at one pathway and dismiss any other sort of information that doesn't fit our limited worldviews.

I'm trying to say that we are constantly classified into a simplified spectrum from light to dark. But I'm also trying to say that once we trespass that and actually get to know people's experiences, we access a different dimension of life and we become truly present in a civilized world with a true spectrum of infinite color.

I'm trying to say that the color of my skin should not dictate how I should act, what I should wear, how I should speak, or how I should live. But I'm also trying to say that we should not run from our characteristics, both physical and acquired.

I'm trying to say it is not bad to be different. But I am also trying to say that it should not define how I live my life. I am inspired by the vivid colors of my culture and influenced by memories of home in Colombia. Art and writing permit me to liberate my emotions and, in a certain way, feel at peace... at least for a couple of minutes.

Veronica Pedrosa Abdala, *Illustrator*

I find **freedom** in the discipline of **boundaries**—the boundaries of the window, and of the canvas.

I love how poetic shadows are. They lie in a space between the absence and the presence, the seen and the unseen, the acknowledged and the unacknowledged.

We see shadows through the absence of light. They exist because of the absence, but cannot be seen unless the light is present around them. When light shines through a window, the frames of light have been selected into a new space. And the spaces in between one frame of light to another, now are selected as shadows. I am not doing the selecting, deleting, or the letting-go, but Nature is. I simply, and humbly, search, observe, and discover.

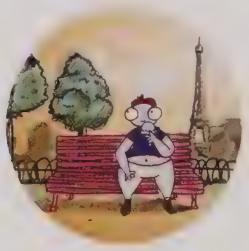
The discovered image, I invite into another reality—through paint, onto the canvas. But why must I come back to the canvas: the rectangle, the frame? Some say we must run away from restrictions, break out of the box, and be 'free.'

I find freedom in the discipline of the boundaries—the boundaries of the window, and of the canvas. There are boundaries in writing too, in both content and form—just as painting. When you tell a story, there is a structure to follow. The story starts, evolves, and ends.

Even light follows the guidelines of Earth's gravity. In the presence of its power, it bends and moves. The power becomes a rhythm, and with shadows as a partner, they dance in space and time. Light and shadow, painting and writing: In the subtle tension of the dualities of reality, I dance with Nature.

Leena Cho, *Painter*

In a world where everyone is striving **to be perfect**, I am learning to **embrace** my distinguishing **trademarks.**



I am finally beginning to love my nose. For a long time, it's been an obtrusion on my face that I have wanted to change. I'm not sure where this resentment came from. Maybe it's because I was beginning to look too much like my father. Or maybe it came from the idea that in order to fit in and be accepted in society, I needed to look a certain way. From this constant pressure about what I should look like, came my love for fantasy, fairytales, and stories.

If the world truly were a perfect place, there would be no stories, no excitement or adventure. We would live in a monotone terrarium with nothing worth fighting for and nothing to discuss. In a perfect world, we lose individuality and the desire to be unique. The dark times each of us experience give way to a gleaming light. Losing a loved one is not an end. Instead, it leads to another path—a path filled with new memories, new experiences, a path that will fill your heart with a different kind of love. As much as I dream of fantastical worlds, I try to remember to keep my feet firmly planted in reality. Letting your mind run loose is fun, but when you can no longer grasp the earth beneath your feet, all hell may break loose.

I guess that's probably the reason why I love my nose more and more. It tells a story, my story. In a world where everyone is striving to be perfect, I am learning to embrace my distinguishing trademarks. And I can't imagine experiencing my fairytale without a feature that has defined so much of who I am.

Nicholas Collazo, *Animator*

I want to be honest about the way things are.

I want to be honest about the way things are.

Where I come from, people don't go to college. My peers have kids or work as hairdressers, carpenters or mechanics. These jobs are predetermined. Your uncle is a mechanic and you do the same. No one asks how your feel about the work. You're expected to do the job. When my mom and dad came home from work, they were tired. There was no time to discuss feelings. The truth is that discussing feelings was a sign of weakness in my community. Work is the answer to most questions.

When you see a working class family depicted in the media, the family is mocked for their ways of being. This way of defining my community bothers me. A lot. I write and create to show another view: When you don't have much, you take great pride in the objects that you do have. You take care of them and pass them down to the next generation. You fix, repair, and rebuild.

Take the blue snowsuit. Though mangled, it is shiny in my artwork, a trophy of sorts. It has a history. I grew up in New England where we spent hours outside building snowforts, sledding and fighting in hand-me-down snowsuits that never fit. Our gloves had no mate. Our coats were punctured by tree branches and the lining of our boots were scrunched up.

As a maker I do not pass judgment. Not having money is okay. With my art, the materials, objects, techniques all come from my social strata, and they are used to create a full truth.

Honesty is not easy. When I make and write, I am surprised by the strength it takes to be sensitive. In this work, feelings are a necessity. They are the source of my inspiration. And when I make art and write about these objects from my past, I liberate myself. I reconcile with not just a memory, but an entire upbringing.

The constraint of the page is the best way for me to start.

Leah Gilbode, *Sculptor*

I want future generations to have the option of listening to stories that are meaningful.

I write because no one wrote for me. The only history I can relate to is one shared by the two people who raised me, my parents. They did their job, and now it's time for me to do mine.

As a first generation American, my work provides the ground and the seed that I hope will grow fruits from the hard labor I have been taught to honor. I feel the pressure to succeed for those who follow me. Sometimes the pressure that I place on myself can feel overwhelming. However, generations before me have suffered economic hardships that were necessary if there is ever going to be a real break from our social structure.

My father risked everything by crossing this country's border to create a better life for his family. Because of his alien status, I was disheartened when I saw my parents fight for their children even though everything worked against them. I was fortunate enough to be able to attend a prestigious high school because of my grades in middle school. There I learned about important distinctions between those who were rich and those who were not. I rode my bike for three miles to drop off my sister at middle school, and I remember thinking that these physical experiences were going to be an important part in the development of my story some day. Now at MassArt, feeling isolated by my experiences, I remind myself that a strong work ethic is good, and I must show acts of kindness and love.

In design I have learned that we are collaborators in this process of cultivating our stories. I want future generations to have the option of listening to stories that are meaningful. Still I struggle to speak. I write because no one wrote for me.

Josh Hernandez, *Designer*

I discovered a terrific connection between walking and creating.

When I was younger and my friend Melinda and I reflected on our days, I discovered a terrific connection between walking and creating. We asked each other: What were the best and worst parts of your day? We never wanted our days to become covered with what Virginia Woolf called, "cotton wool" or "non-being." So each day we took care to observe something extraordinary, good or bad, hopefully both.

Melinda and I discovered how to feel content by constantly moving. All my favorite thinkers are big walkers too: Henry David Thoreau, Maira Kalman, George Orwell, and Aristotle. I write and create during the moments that I'm walking. Once I wandered into the Boston Public Library. I looked at old art books and discovered Frida Kahlo. Kahlo's poetic lyrics and passionate drawings brought me to tears. I can still remember the feeling of the red carpet underneath me that was faded like a dried, pink grapefruit, as I thought about her heartaches, her deep misfortunes, and her thoughts on existence. Until that gray February day, I didn't know that I needed Kahlo's thoughts to mingle with my need and desire to keep searching for my creative self.

The good and the bad show up in the most surprising ways. The other night as I walked on Carmel Drive, I stumbled upon a pink patterned sofa on the sidewalk. It was nearly broken in two parts. The springs and inner linings exploded from the middle. It was magnificent. I felt that the sofa expressed my uncertainty on whether there is a point to the things that I do. Walks without purpose open possibilities to allow my brain to clear, to explore and feel through my senses and movement. Now when I walk, I carry the same question that writer Rebecca Solnit carried for awhile: "How will you go about finding that thing the nature of which is totally unknown to you?"

I write to remember the simplicity of these lush moments.

Caitlin Mavilia, *Illustrator and Sculptor*

In my art, I try to process these uncertainties.

Between two mountains, my abuelito fell after battle during the revolution in Nicaragua. Maybe it was between two volcanoes. My father was seventeen years old when he looked for my grandfather's body. Everything changed. The distance grew among my family members. This tumultuous period left marks on us.

A mark: My parents emigrated to the U.S. I was born in the U.S., but not into the American culture. The language that I use is determined by where I am. At school, English is my only option. Cuando estoy con familia, my words are spoken in Spanish.

A mark: My parents' experience and degrees are not valid here. Their jobs and their economic status are defined by their immigrant identity.

A mark: We lost a lot of family members. For example, my mother's younger brother was kidnapped by the rebels for service in their army. Cuando le dieron la noticia de su hijo, mi abuela no lo podía creer, se pregunto mil y una veces, ¿sera verdad?

A mark: Whenever the revolution is talked about in my family, the conversations become very emotional. I'm usually not a part of these conversations. No es mi historia. My family's history is still a mystery to me.

A mark: An uncle, a professor of political science who looks like my dad (he is his half brother), dedicated his life to answering questions about my grandfather: ¿Que podría ser tan poderoso que haría que un hombre dejara su familia? ¿Cual sera mi pregunta?

Otra marca: In my art, I try to process these uncertainties. I have created fictional collages with alternative narratives on what happened to us. The root of my work is a very humanistic yearning to mend lost connections. Yet many expect me to focus on political topics. It is difficult not to become trapped in these expectations. Deseo crear arte que le de las respuestas que mi espiritu busca.

Otra marca: In my writing, I practice the courage necessary to be able to say what I feel and think. Escribo de la vida que espero vivir.

Rebekak Y. Vargas, *Multimedia Artist*

Participants reveal moments of growth

This just gave me a revelation: there is no line.

In January I scrolled through Facebook and found a Chinese American woman writing about the struggles of being Asian American. She said she can't have two identities; one always gets erased by the other. I found myself empathizing with her, but I didn't hit like or even share it. I just scrolled past. But I still remember her words.

My passport says I'm from one country but I disagree. I know two countries and cultures: Japan and the United States. I feel I understand both well enough to say I can be either. I do not identify with one more than the other. Yet, here in the United States, I sometimes feel I don't fit in. Often I am asked if I am a foreigner. No matter how much I want to fit in, my ethnicity makes up my whole identity for everyone else. When I travel to Japan, I have to ask questions like a foreigner, even though I am not. At a train station I may need to ask for directions, and it feels surreal to ask for directions in my own country.

Unlike the Chinese woman on Facebook who feels erased, I feel invalid. Sometimes I wonder where the line is in my understanding between one culture and the other. I feel as if my identity is just this ambiguous blob wandering around.

This just gave me a revelation: there is no line. This is like design. My attraction to design comes because there are no borders, there are no lines. Great designers always have looked past that. I wish someday I can be a designer like that—fluid through countries, cultures, and aesthetic. I wish to develop a language in design: my very own language that would validate having multiple cultures in one identity.

Ayumi Yoshida, *Designer*

We all know that feeling of a vehicle full of good ideas...

When everything inside of me wants to break my teeth in order to get out my own truth, I pick up a pen at 3 a.m. and write on whatever scrap of leftover pocket junk I can find. We all know that feeling of a vehicle full of good ideas or poetic truth hitting you full force like a soccer ball to the face. I've been there many nights (and days if you count the soccer balls) and nothing ever hit that sweet spot like the words I curate on a page after a period of ineffability; an incomprehensible vague feeling made valid with ink on a page. And yet, unlike most, my command of English over Portuguese holds connotations that pick at my sense of self—as if my tongue and heart don't have the same blood.

Therefore, I create. I say what I need to say through my making, a conversation on history with clay, a history that provides me the ability to capture it because of the struggles of my parents. I want to use art as my instrument of connection to understand the Brazilian culture that raised me and through the American culture that shaped me. I create and curate conversations through my writing and making.

My name is Gustavo Tavares Barceloni, *sou brazuca, sou gringo, sou artista, sou filho de imigrantes,* and I act with the intention to shape the power of these labels, to tell a nuanced history heard by another generation of *brazucas*, of *gringos,* like me.

Gustavo Tavares Barceloni, *Ceramic Artist*

I am a translator who has found purpose through necessity.

I am a translator who has found purpose through necessity.

Translation is supposed to be an innocuous act, but every word becomes a bomb in a battlefield. I am aware of the lives I'm responsible for when I am appointed as both general and messenger of my consanguineous army. My body trembles with the incredible burden, and I predict only disaster. A slip of the tongue here, a missed phrase there, and a bill goes unpaid. A child warily awaits a pick-up that never happens. A diagnosis falls on illiterate ears. Each mistake is an eaten ration, is a lost friend, is a civilian death. Translation then becomes precise, it becomes surgery, and it becomes my family's last line of defense.

Thirteen years old, and my word is gospel.

"What does it say?" my mother asks, her gaze blank on a school newsletter, a medical exam, an eviction notice. My tongue quivers and stumbles between one, two, one-and-a-half parlances with the clumsiness of a native. I translate the text, and in the spaces between I translate the burden of knowledge. I translate the anxiety between me and words, for words are frequential slurry seeping through my cortexial carpet. I stitch together the organic fragments of a language I call home through the galvanized steel of clinical palaver, and gurgle the disjointed syntax that results. Again, and again, and again.

Twenty-four years old, and my word is practice.

My repertoire expands. I translate the past to the present. I take in and translate the language of space—the space between objects, the space between words, the space between synapses. I translate the furious, ugly noise that you, and I, and we choose to drown out, and whisper it in silence. I translate blood and anguish with flowers and greeting cards. I translate with the knowledge that my translations can foster and destroy. I translate with the knowledge that there are many who wish to remain lost in translation.

I revel in the knowledge that my translations are my most powerful apparatus.

Mariana Yanes Cabral, *Educator, Interdisciplinary Artist*

I want to give voice to the voiceless.

Am I asking too much to want to express myself in a meaningful way in my work?

For a long time, I have been searching for my identity as a designer. Now that I am graduating, one of the issues that I feel I must confront is: Is my work too "Black?" For interviews, I changed my hair by putting it in braids to hide my Afro. And when a graphic design speaker told me that I might have the opportunity to work in a diversity department, I didn't defend myself from the stereotyping. The message that I heard from this speaker was: "The diversity department is all that I am good for." Yet, in my heart I know that my job is to be the best designer that I can be—wherever I work. Still, questions about identity and work persist. Before I start a new project, I worry about the possibility of this reaction: "Oh there she goes again making work about Black people." But I am Black. I am a designer who appreciates her roots. And I have learned that there is only so long that you can act like a fraud before it catches up with you. By focusing exclusively on making others feel comfortable, I was hurting myself.

I want to give voice to the voiceless. To find my way back to my dream of giving voice to those who have been silenced, I began to surround myself with friends who supported me. With my guardian angels—my friends by my side—I understood what it truly meant to be a designer in my own right. What I needed was acceptance and they offered it. For a long time, I felt separated from everyone that I was seeing around me in the design world. Now, by acknowledging my own accomplishments, I am becoming the person that I want to be.

Gamuchirai Dhliwayo, *Graphic Designer*

...for a first–hand account of everything that was **beautiful** and **intimate** and **ordinary** in my life.

I think of myself in the future: an old woman, sitting in a leather chair looking back on her life. She wonders how she arrived in this chair, in this place, in this body. Her mind is wide, wide—wide and infinite—a vault of fragmented memories that feel familiar like the stars that she sees every night, yet knows nothing about.

For as long as I can remember, I've had a fear of forgetting what happened to me. By the age of 6, my mind was buzzing, and I felt compelled to capture those feelings somewhere. My mother bought me a bright blue notebook that had a tiny gold clasp on the edge and I began to write. Through writing, I could become two people: the vessel which the words could pass through, and a witness to the creation happening right before my eyes. I loved to watch my hand and my mind make sweet cursive harmony, absorbing the page and leaving behind a mess of thick black letters. By the time I was 24, I had filled over 10 boxes of journals.

Documenting has become a life obsession. I've always felt compelled to write by some unknown force, fueled by a fear of forgetting and a desire to immortalize my memories. I wonder if that unknown force is really just me in the future, begging for a first-hand account of everything that was beautiful and intimate and ordinary in my life. I think that old woman is the voice I hear in my head; I feel her wanting to be close to me, and so I write to be close to her, to be able to continue the conversation with all the versions of myself.

Brandi Diaz, *Visual Storyteller*

These pages taught me more than I imagined pencil and paper could teach.

Paper and pencil taught me how to be confident. I grew up with a number of different hidden identities that did not come forward until I entered college. Not being aware of these identities caused me to be self-conscious. As I child, I was angry at the things I did not know about myself. And during these critical early years, I did not know why my friends saw me as being different. Drawing helped me speak in ways that I could not. My drawings consisted of characters that looked like what I wanted to look like or words that I was not able to say. At first, I secretly drew behind closed doors because I was afraid. Yet, as these pages grew, I started to grow. When I entered MassArt, I was forced to show my sketchbook to everyone. These pages of emotions came forth and could no longer be hidden, just as I could no longer be hidden.

These pages taught me more than I imagined a pencil and paper could teach. Because I continued sketching aspects of my life when I had no one to talk to, I learned how to speak for myself and no longer be afraid of my existence in this world. Paper and pencil taught me to be confident with my unique voice.

I continue to do work as an illustrator creating images that speak to an audience. Although the pages in my sketchbook are no longer a source for hiding, they still provide comfort. They continue to teach me about myself, and they help me grow in confidence after years of struggle.

Sandra Gonzalez, *Illustrator*

Do what you believe in.

Do what you believe in.

I know what it feels like to be misunderstood. Biological families can complicate understanding, especially if they like a lot of drama. Sometimes I feel like I am the family lifeguard who risks downing every time I try to save them. In fact, in my childhood, I lost many things—even at times my clothing—but I never lost my belief in the beauty of fashion which comes from living with a family of womyn. My sister was overweight and now I am thinking about designing plus-size clothes. I want to open the doors to the fashion world to create a more loving world for womyn.

Take a risk.

Your risk may disable oppression. Why not try? Because locked refrigerators and trash bags in place of suitcases are not the answer for hungry children or children on the move between homes. Take a risk. Your action could change the life of another person. During my childhood, I felt like I had been going through a war: me versus everyone else. Now I risk connecting with others, including my current foster home dads. In my art, I play with a lot of objects: fabric, yarn, food, lamps. I use people too. Their postures may have a heavenly feeling. I used to call my pieces revealing, quiet, and deadly works of art. Deadly in the sense that you have to take a risk and think about things that might scare you—like speaking up for yourself.

Don't worry about the opinions of others.

Many members of my biological family do not understand my passion for art. But inside myself I knew what I wanted to do. I'd like others to understand my love of fashion. Nothing moves me like the fold in fabric or light reflecting from rough edges. The reason I want to focus on fashion is to create more peace for everyone. Fashion invites respect. And if we have a higher self-esteem, especially womyn, we can transcend the hate that people reflect on others. I am halfway there.

J C Hang, *Fashion Designer*

When I write, I am reminded how my caring provides comfort.

My art became integrated with my life when I realized that making and creating allows me to care. The circle of care, at least in Indian families, embraces all generations. By family, we mean the "wider family" than others may consider: parents, grandparents, siblings, cousins, even second cousins and in-laws. Also, age is an important consideration for respect. I admired how my parents made an attempt to reach out to our extended family despite being miles apart. There were numerous phone calls. Vacations and visits were planned around my summer holidays to the never ending list of newborn cousins. Still, when I was younger, I felt like my parents "cared" too much because it was all about the family. Today, I know that even when I make a simple ten minute phone call or plan a visit to meet a cousin living in the area, I make a difference to that person and to myself for that matter.

When I write, I am reminded how my caring provides comfort. For example, even a humble note to a loved one can remind both of us of the other person's existence even though afar. The words simply bring us together; acknowledging the connections around us. This is true even when we both know we don't have the power to change a difficult situation. And when I create, I explore many dimensions of care. I express care when I gather stories from users, the individuals who will use the produce, to inform my designs. I care for the materials that I use until I finish my final making. When I move into production mode, I try not to forget the humble practice of carving out space for caring—the ability to feel and think for yourself, others and the environment. What I am making is not just for myself.

Perhaps the most significant element of caring is the role it plays in our interactions with others. From families to communities to societies, caring is, in essence, the glue that holds together our world's web of people.

Himanshi Jesrani, *Designer*

I write because thoughts are not enough proof.

Then

I write because thoughts are not enough proof. Thoughts pretend to be weak when I know they are strong. My brain exhales and I tip my head. Words overflow. The river floods, but I am stuck in the water. I write to break the dam of words. I catch my thoughts as they flow by and toss them on the page. This process hurts because it feels as if my thoughts were never meant to be on land. Where did this feeling come from? This feeling that my thoughts were never meant to be so permanent as pen to paper? My brain folds in on its own reflections. My mind covers thoughts and suppresses dreams. Memories are stifled.

Now

I write to prove that I do not need to be protected from my own thoughts and memory. Writing is stronger than my own vocal chords. Timid thoughts try to escape my lips. They retreat and settle in my stomach. For fear of not being heard, these thoughts rustle in panic until I pick up a pen. I write and I read and I listen to my own thoughts inviting others to share in this intimate journey. My thoughts on paper strengthen the words on my lips, and in my head and my heart. Expressing myself becomes a full body experience. I step into it. When I am tired of looking at the ground, I raise my head to the paper.

Brenna Kennedy, *Industrial Designer*

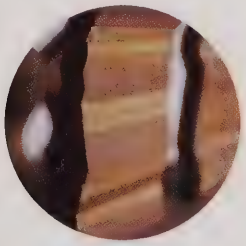
My hands are a middleman to the city between my ears and a blank page.

In quiet moments, I sometimes turn over my hands to admire how time has marred my flesh. I have memorized the hollows and depressions, the peaks and malleability in each finger. I know my hands' strengths and weakness—they are subjected to so much. I suppose the fascination with hands and the magic of ten fingers comes from knowing they allow me to hold a pen to paper and a brush to canvas. My hands are an exposed history, born and scuffed from experiences; from years of spilling and archiving words that were not allowed to escape my lips; from years of documenting the darkness of the deepest caverns of my mind and the lightest portals to my soul; from years of moving to the dance of ideas and memories and truths all waiting to be told.

I write to release the demons and to comfort the madness. They rendezvous on occasion, the demons and the madness, to convalesce and to plot, using my hands as a stenographer. My hands are a middleman to the city between my ears and a blank page. Without my hands nothing could ever come to fruition. Some things are not meant to be told; sometimes recollection is not enough and all that remains is an urge to communicate through ink or type or paint. Through it all, there my hands will be ready to give and the blank surface of the canvas or paper ready to receive. I write to give history to my hands.

Michaela Mann, *Painter*

There is not one **life lesson** that I haven't had to **learn from scratch.**



Once a friend said, "When I speak with you, sometimes I forget you are not from here." Initially I reacted to this statement as if it was solely based on the way I spoke. But it also references my body language, what I wear, who I am close to. After seven years studying in the U.S., the concept of home has become far from simple. I'm afraid that I have lost so much of myself while being here.

When I tell people where I am from, my declaration of home is not for them. Instead, I am validating myself for my own well–being. Whenever that is challenged, I retreat. A few years ago at an African Economic Development Studies seminar, I was eager to find sanctuary. When the speaker learned that I was from Angola, his first question was: "Were your parents from Angola?"

"Yes," I responded. "But I was also born and raised there."

The speaker assumed that I must be from the U.S. and I had to repeat that I was born in Angola. In that moment, I realized that I had hoped a stranger would acknowledge my identity. I had made myself vulnerable without considering the consequence. There is not one life lesson that I haven't had to learn from scratch. Now, these experiences that I am describing here—this constant questioning of the validity of my identity—happen in Angola, too. My younger cousins in Angola have said to me "you hold onto specific speech expressions," as they noticed when I was unable to quickly reintegrate myself into the language.

It is in verbal, written, and visual language where I find myself needing to stand my ground the most and although it feels like there isn't room for self-doubt, it happens anyway. Doubt occupies space in my mind, which then occupies the physical world around me. It impacts the ways in which I encounter people, structures, and ultimately in the ways in which I encounter myself, the self.

Writing and creating ask me to keep doing the work to stay connected.

Wandy Pascoal, *Designer*

I write to hold the many stories in me.

~~This is my third attempt.~~ This is my fourth attempt to answer *why i write. why i create.* I am sure of more attempts because I have more than one story. I write to hold together the many stories in me. The language and the words don't have to arrange themselves in the same way; sometimes Spanish will be first and sometimes English will lead; sometimes happiness, other times anxiety.

Let's start from zero because I know some things about starting again and again. I am from Puerto Rico, and I used to think that if I forgot my first language, Spanish, I'd be losing part of myself. After four years and six months in the United States, I realize that I won't lose that part of my story. I won't lose my culture. I am lucky and unlucky to have more than one story.

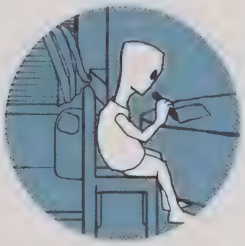
Once I thought happiness was a material thing. As I grew, I understood happiness is about who you are and how you decide to feel. I am grateful for my job that helps me pay my bills and pay for school so I may study what I love. Deep inside, I know that fashion design is my work. Is happiness related to passion? Do they share the same ups and downs? And what do I make of anxiety?

Anxiety is one of my many stories. I want to put it on a piece of paper and forget about it, but can't. Even if I don't want to admit it, anxiety helped shape who I am. Anxiety has caused me excess worry, but it has also kept me safe. For me, persistence holds happiness and anxiety together. Persistence helps to remind me to be strong.

I am here to create for happiness. It shows in the colors of my fabric choices. I can't stop it from coming forward. Maybe this is the beginning of my fifth attempt at answering *why i write. why i create.*

Marianicy Cruz, *Fashion Designer*

Black should be prideful of its creation into this world.



Black (blăk) adjective/noun/verb

~~That which is destitute of light or whiteness;~~ the darkness of color, ~~or rather a destitution of all as, a cloth has a good black. Black is the badge of hell, the hue of dungeons, and the suit of night. Sullenly; threateningly; maliciously; so as to produce blackness. A stain; a spot; a smooch. To make black; to blacken; to soil, to sully. To make black and shining, as boots or a stove, by applying blacking and then polishing with a brush.~~ http://www.webster-dictionary.org/definition/Black, 2017.

A member of the color wheel, a tone's neighbor, determined by the darkness of its hue. It represents what it is to be strong (both mentally and emotionally). To be able to take the pain of indifference in contrast to other members of the color wheel. Black can make art in beautiful, unique ways. Black paints hope for the poor and helpless. Black looks to the future for change. Black's will doesn't let others squash it. A strong prideful color that does not back down. Black stands beside the other shades and fights for equality among tones. Black should be prideful of its creation into this world. Black is an accurate role model of what it is to be a color. It is a color that should symbolize hope in every color.

Creating stories is my favorite hobby, including stories about colors. I wish to make this work into something bigger—big enough to share with not just me but the world.

Darrell Hunt, *Animator, Storyteller*

Breathing. Opening. Attending. Respecting.

I didn't leave home with much. I was in such a hurry to get out into life. But I brought my mother's Bernina 710, a solid workhorse sewing machine from the 70's. We've travelled many miles together. Sometimes it has seemed like a burden—a little big, a little heavy. But not taking it has never been an option. Growing up it sat on a big table, and I watched my mother patch jeans and alter hand-me-downs on this machine. Functional. Useful. Practical. Needed. More excitingly, I watched drawings for patterns stitched into real life. Prom dresses and wedding dresses delivered to tears of joy and squeals of delight. Magical. Fanciful. Transformative. Needed.

There have been times when this sewing machine sat in a box in a corner or to the back of a closet; times when I thought "real life" was more important, while the machine sat unopened. Unattended. Unfulfilled. Sometimes it would have its own space on a corner of a table or a shelf. But it wasn't until this sewing machine had its own room that life began to change. I see now that it needed space. That my space needed it. Breathing. Opening. Attending. Respecting.

One morning, folding one of my mom's patchwork quilts led me to seeing my own quilt: blocks of blues and greens like stepping stones on a path. I got out a pencil and made a little drawing. Deep down, I heard a squeal. I transformed the attic and set up my machine on a big table. My hands began instinctively and at last I knew what I needed to do.

Sheri Klak, *Fashion Designer*

When night falls,
it happens
quickly in the forest.

When night descends, it happens quickly in the forest. The sun ducks behind a nearby mountain. Any radiating light is strained through the trees like a sieve. Eventually the tall licking flames of the campfire collapse into a dull orange glow, breaking through the gray ash. The last few meters of defensive yellow light is overpowered by the sieging darkness, until only the last dying embers crackle light a few feet as I zip my tent shut.

The irrational keeps me awake the longest. The dark forest makes anything seem possible; my mind races with thoughts of aggressive Sasquatch and ancient spirits whose territories I may have unwittingly trespassed. On a night like this, fear and reality meet in the darkness.

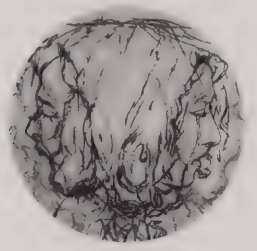
Inches away, just outside the thin tent walls, brush rustles. A soft huffing snort follows, or maybe it is a low grunt. I knew for sure the noise did not belong to a squirrel, raccoon, or porcupine. It was the lumbering breath of something much larger.

That night, I never unzipped the tent, never peeked at my campsite intruder. I held my breath, closed my eyes, and waited to see if I would die. When I told stories about that hiking trip, I mentioned the night and the size of paw prints I found the next morning.

It has been four years since you last asked why I write. I don't believe I have the hope or anger I filled the page with last time. I'm not sure why I write anymore; when I sat down at my desk and thought about why I write, the night in the forest came alive again.

Camden O'Neill, *Illustrator*

I write to
expand myself:
to navigate, to search,
to touch, to hold,
to release,
to breathe.



Sometimes it's hard for me to speak to myself. In tiny notebooks on my phone, I record my thoughts, special blooms of musings I pick throughout the day. Each musing reflects why I am called to write. I write to reflect back on my thoughts. I write to gesture the time and space of my feelings. When I think of a beautiful gesture, I imagine a specific turquoise or a peach. And when a piece is finished, my heart sighs. This is a gesture too. I write to organize beauty from fact. I write to realize that my fear of losing knowledge is what causes these divine seeds of thought to feel real. Instead of indulging in my fears, I try to learn from them and make decisions on which thoughts to remember. With meditation, my art takes form. I write to see what is true. I write to create portals into my mind. I write to expand myself: to navigate, to search, to touch, to hold, to release, to breathe.

I know I shouldn't try to attach myself to every thought that I have, but I need them and they need me.

I write to tap into myself.
I speak to tap into others.
I make to combine the two.

Rico St. Paul, *Maker*

I did know the life that I wanted...

At age 14, I sat in a barren stairwell during self-study and bellowed out lines of beautiful Chinese poetry. My lyrical recitation echoed between the concrete walls and steel stairs: "the golden willows by the riverside / are young brides in the setting sun / their reflections on the shimmering waves / always linger in the depth of my heart." My monochronic surroundings receded, and a romantic mental image of the poet in Cambridge came forth. In his last day before departure, the sentimental poet is reluctant to bid farewell to the gentle waves that glisten under the splendid sun. I lingered there until my teacher criticized me in front of the whole class for wasting precious studying time, and I returned to my seat, tearful and ashamed.

A few years later, a class counselor asked me what I wanted to do in the future. As a child, I was pulled in many directions, among them music, Chinese literature and economics. I told the counselor that I didn't know what job to pursue, but I did know the life I wanted: a quiet, stable life with loving family, caring friends and a rich inner world. Believing the way to reach this life was following my parents' path, I studied economics, my parents' field of expertise. There was a comforting certainty in knowing how life would flow.

But economics was a faint interest. On this path, there was no room to pursue my emotional response to Chinese poetry. I was in an educational system that favored intellectual development;. it took a long battle to let go of the certainty of that world. Does a person need to experience estrangement to find their true home?

Now I am discovering that there are other ways to reach this quiet happiness I yearn for. I follow my curiosity in abstract expressionism, performance art, philosophy and Chinese poetry, to name a few. My drive to explore feels like a deep hunger. I am not ashamed anymore. I embrace every bit of sentimentality that I once abandoned. I am learning to endure unpredictability to find my way home.

Alice Yingrong Shao, *Multimedia Artist*

The thrill of the moment kept the experience vivid in my mind.

I write to be reminded of my deep memories. I think of the future more than I reflect on the past. But there are moments in my life when I stop and listen, smell, and see something familiar to me. My senses trigger my memories and send me into a nostalgic loop. Once, when I was very young, I attended an open house with my parents who were searching for a new home. It was late afternoon, and we entered a house that was yet to be completed. The smell of fresh lumber and sawdust stays with me to this day. The hallways seemed to wind into endless paths, and I felt I could explore this place forever. I remember my older sister and I entered a spacious room through a loft. My parents entered through the ground floor. My sister and I crawled together to a space with no railings separating us from the space where our parents stood below. We sat down on the edge of the loft looking over the whole room lit with the filtered light from the skylight. The room glowed with the warm color of the plywood and all the loose dust danced around in the negative space. The thrill of the moment kept the experience vivid in my mind. I wouldn't recognize that house now, but I have reconstructed the feeling of that visit in my memory—a quiet moment that inspired me to pursue my current path studying architecture. I write to remind myself why I am taking this path today. I create to offer this magical feeling for a space to others, just as this house did to me.

Tomomi Yoshida, *Designer*

Are you in the letters of my alphabet soup?

Dear Universality,

I've been conducting research to try to understand you for some time now. There aren't really any straight facts about you or how to find you. No address. No birthdate. No definition that clearly tells me who you are. Is it true that vulnerability is your older brother and empathy your younger sister born just two minutes after you? Or are they both distant cousins or maybe friends that you have known since childhood?

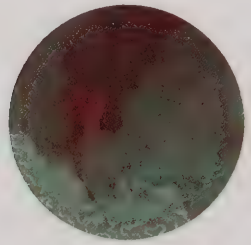
My family is complicated. Every distant relative is an aunt, uncle, or cousin. It's just easier that way, but I have a feeling your family refuses to be looked at that simply.

Now my fear of vulnerability still lingers, but I've pushed past it and have tried to show my deepest thoughts and feelings. I screamed my story from the top of the mountain, from the top of many different mountains. While walking back down these mountains, I've run into empathy. I stopped and chatted with empathy and shared with empathy a few sips of tea from my thermos.

When will I find you universality? Are you invisible? Are you watching me in silence from behind a wide tree? Or... or have I not run into you yet? You must tell me because I do feel we live in the same town, maybe on the same street. Are you the letters in my alphabet soup? Are you the broth?

Ariana Chariton, *Fashion Designer*

I am from many stories read and **abandoned**, or **transformed** and adapted.



I am from soy milk and syrup, from moonlit spars in mind and body.

I am from many stories read and abandoned, or transformed and adapted.

I am from skate park trips and scraped knees, bent down to observe the lives of bees.

I am from blistering winters, skirting frozen rivers, from ten legs trailing, four ablaze, busy nights and peeks at sunrise, from the company of friends to solitude for days.

I am from practice and practice more, from warm words and cold implications.

I am from hazelnuts on one coffee table (with the aftertaste of George's jokes), and newspapers on the other (smelling, like Nani, of firewood smoke).

I am from a brotherhood, "broken or fixed?"

I am from a family that I now know to call mixed.

I am from cat hair and Pokémon matches, from comic books and amphibian catches, from rural to suburb to city.

I am from daily hospital drives accompanied by the recital of playlists, and between songs, my mark finds home on paper.

Indë Francis, *Illustrator*

Truth finally arrived through every piece of writing and every work of art.

The heterosexual version of Jessica L. Malenfant tragically passed away on March 15, 2016. Jessica, seventeen years old, was too young to pass. The bright future that lay ahead of her suddenly dimmed, every dream her parents ever had for her lost to the tragedy of time. Jessica will never meet the man of her dreams, never be wed with four kids in a house with a white fence. She was meant to go to college, adorned in delicate jewelry and a fitted dress with her hair long and brown and gently tossing in the breeze. She was supposed to see a handsome boy sitting across from her in her first lecture, and he would give her a dazzling smile, and she would bring him home for Thanksgiving. But this life was put to a violent, shocking end. Beloved Jessica's heart stopped, the blood froze in her veins, clutched onto so tightly by her weeping parents. She must have existed. She simply must have. How did it turn out this way? Was it something they did, something that caused her death? Should they not have let her play in the mud or pick out boys t-shirts at the thrift store, or sleep over at girls' houses at age fourteen? Her parents wonder, how could she have lied to them, manipulated them, betrayed them like this?

"Give me more time," her father finally stated, after three grueling months of no contact since the incident of her death. He explained, "It is difficult for me to forgive or accept what I believe is wrong."

But for Jessica, it is also difficult to accept what she believes, no, what she knows is wrong. Forsaking who you really are to keep an idealized dream alive is wrong. Identity. Expression. These things were buried in her youth. And with her death, she became alive. Truth finally arrived, through every piece of writing and every work of art. This truth is honest. It's a truth that she thought would only exist as a ghost. And so she writes. I am her. I am alive.

Jess Malenfant, *Animator*

Art is born from the womb and body of memory serving as a physical form of a creative human endeavor.

"She was the spirit of the elephant."

When those words came out, I couldn't believe it. It had been about five years since my grandma Judy passed away and missing her came out in a specific tone of voice—an embodiment of "damnnn." She was my dad's mother, a Southern woman. I mean, she was as southern as someone from Maine can get. While she lived all over the states, she lived in Maine for decades.

I followed my grandma everywhere and did everything she did. She was my best friend, my homie. I spent weeks at a time at her house making the best memories. It meant everything to me as a multiracial child. As I grew, I became more aware of my family's complexities. Tainting white lineage comes with ramifications.

Art is born from the womb and body of memory, serving as a physical form of a creative human endeavor. I don't think that my art would be as powerful, considered, or skillful without my memories. My multilayered inheritance is an important part of my identity as a writer and artist. My inheritance, an incarnation including a small porcelain Asian elephant, belonged to my grandma Judy. The statue is petite, but it holds the power of an elephant that weighs several tons. The memories I have of my fiery Southern grandmother are supercharged in that elephant that stands in the middle of my palm. Memories of her deathless support for me as an artist, her unconditional yet tough love created a source for writing and creating. My grandma reminded me of my duty as an artist. It wasn't about what I greedily wanted, worrying about getting paid or being recognized for my skill (although there isn't anything wrong with that). It was about serving as a voice for others. Without the memory of my grandma's words, I wouldn't understand what it means to selflessly create art for others.

There is not a day that passes that I don't think of her. I knew her to be calm, strong, and wise. She was the embodiment of the elephant's spirit.

Elcie Merck, *Artist*

...to assert who I am and who I want to be, someone who can write and create in both cultures at once.

I'm never quite attached to the country I live in, the country that I grew up in, the country that constantly doubts if I really belong. I often feel like I don't fit into the fabric of this European-dominated nation. Often, I am asked the question: Where are you really from? I usually tell people that I was born in Turkey. But just once I'd like to confront them and ask: What do you mean by that question? What prompts you to think I might not be as American as you?

I think of myself as coming from two lands at once—Turkey and the U.S.—but I'm never quite connected to either one. Often there are times when I feel less like I belong to Turkish culture, almost to the point I want to disassociate. This is especially true when I go back to Turkey, and I feel almost as out of place as I do in the U.S. Why do I feel so out of place? Maybe it's because I wasn't exposed to TV shows or books about immigrant kids like me, telling me that I belong. Maybe it's because I had to shoulder the burden of growing up in a country that feared Muslims. Maybe it's because I grew up in a post-9/11 political climate and lived with all the negative images about Muslims that bombarded me and subconsciously made me feel ashamed. Maybe it's because of that simple desire to fit in.

I feel like a visitor to my own country, the United States—an unwelcomed tourist, an invader, an unpopular political issue. Perhaps that's why I need to connect to Turkey—to assert who I am and who I want to be, someone who can write and create in both cultures at once.

Doruk Uzel, *Animator*

Background information

Mentor Bios

Dr. Mary K. Grant is a national leader in public higher education with over 30 years experience championing the arts, deepening community partnerships, and cultivating civic engagement. She is the President of Massachusetts College of Art and Design, the Vice Chair of the Board of Directors for the Norman Rockwell Museum, and the Board Chair of Campus Compact. Her previous leadership positions include: President of Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA), Chancellor of the University of North Carolina Asheville, President of the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate, and Senior Fellow for Civic and Social Justice at Bridgewater State University. At MassArt, President Grant has built a diverse leadership team, reactivated the campus following the pandemic, and built ties with Boston's corporate and legislative communities. Dr. Grant holds a PhD from Brandeis University, a MS from the University of Massachusetts Boston, and a B.A. from MCLA/ North Adams State College.

Jeanette Luise Eberhardy PhD, MFA is an essayist, book artist, educator, and curator. She designs educational experiences to optimize growth and to craft stories on meaningful work. At the Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Eberhardy teaches creative nonfiction writing and serves as program chair for the 1st year writing program titled Thinking Making Writing. Her newest course, The Experimental Essay, explores emerging literary art forms.

Eberhardy publishes and speaks on inclusive pedagogical strategies. She also curates exhibits that reflect the theme: not one voice but many. Her most recent exhibits include: *5th Year Retrospective for why I write. why I create* shown at Boston City Hall and *Making Empathy: Collaborative Journaling during the Pandemic*. In her artistic practices, Eberhardy publishes memoir essays and combines her passion for writing, art, and books by designing artist's books.

Eberhardy holds a PhD in Educational Psychology and an MFA in Creative Nonfiction Writing. She has delivered her storytelling workshops in Egypt, Sweden, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Germany, and the U.S.

Debbie Hagan, MFA is an author, editor, journalist, essayist, creative nonfiction writer, and educator. Her work has appeared in books, magazines, newspapers, anthologies, exhibition catalogs, and elsewhere She is the author of the narrative nonfiction book *Against the Tide* and former editor-in-chief of *Art New England Magazine*. She is former book reviews editor of *Brevity* online literary journal, and her essays, interviews, and reviews have appeared in *Sunlight Press,*82 Review, Dillydoun Review, Raft, Riverteeth, Harvard Review, Superstition Review, Hyperallergic, Pleiades, Brain Child,* plus various anthologies, including *Dime Stories, Fearless Confessions,* and *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. Debbie holds an MFA from Goucher College and has taught writing courses at Massachusetts College of Art and Design, New Hampshire Institute of Art, Dean College, Grub Street, Maine Alliance of Publishers and Writers, What Cheer Writers Club, and elsewhere. She is at work on a memoir.

Lyssa Palu-ay, PhD, MFA is an artist, educator, and scholar. Palu-ay is Dean of the office of Justice, Equity and Transformation (JET) at Massachusetts College of Art and Design. She guides and leads work to achieve systemic equity and transform campus culture. She oversees MassArt's pathway programs from high school (Artward Bound) to college (Compass). She was a member of

the Steering Committee that developed Massachusetts Department of Higher Education's Strategic Plan for Racial Equity.

Palu-ay presents and publishes on: equitable and inclusive pedagogy, critical race theory, history of institutes of art and design and experiences of students of color in art and design education. Her presentations at national conferences include: Race and Pedagogy, Puget Sound, WA; Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design, Brooklyn, NY; American Educational Research Association, San Antonio, Texas. Her own art practices focus on the relationship between landscape, memory and sacred space. Her work is published in the Maine Review and Nueva Luz. Palu-ay earned her PhD in 2016 at University of Massachusetts Boston and a MFA from Massachusetts College of Art and Design.

Sondra Grace, MS recently completed two catalogs *Then & Now* and *Pattern Engineering* showcasing collections from the MassArt Fashion Design Archive. The catalogs feature designs of MassArt alumni Alfred Fiandaca and Shirley Willett along with works from other designers. The Archive represents over 20 years of collecting garments, millinery, shoes, handbags, textiles and ephemera. It makes accessible an investigation process that connects fashion history and design with cultural and social influences that speak to how we see, wear, collect and study fashion.

Professor Emerita Grace chaired the Fashion Design Department at MassArt for over 20 years and taught courses on Pattern Drafting, Tailoring and senior-year Degree Project. She has collaborated with MIT's Media Lab and the Boston University School of Engineering in addition to developing projects for MassArt students with Anne Fontaine, Primark and Stuart Weitzman. She is a MassArt Fashion Design alumna and earned a MS in Cultural Studies from the University of Massachusetts.

In 1997, **Lin Haire-Sargeant, PhD** was drawn into MassArt's creative fusion of visual art and the written word. She teaches courses such as Graphic Novels, Children's Literature, Why Novels Now?, and Playwriting in which the study of established classics enables the creation of the students' own graphic novels, children's books, novels, and plays.

Haire-Sargeant has authored varied works, including *H.—The Story of Heathcliff's Journey back to Wuthering Heights* (a novel); *Dead* (a play); and (with Cleo and Nadia Belber) *The Forever Present* (a children's musical). Her most recent metafiction, *Who Is Jo March?*, imagines an alternate history for the heroine of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, in which Jo and Laurie break out of the confines of the very social and gender constraints of Civil War America that plagued Alcott herself.

Founder and curator of Constant Readers, a Liberal Arts literary club, Haire-Sargeant is a former Chair of Liberal Arts.

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Joshua Cohen, Department Chair, 2018-2019
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THINKING MAKING WRITING FACULTY FOR THE PAST 5 YEARS, KEEPERS OF THE FLAME OF OUR STORIES

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why i write
why i create

5th Year Retrospective

2015–2019